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Testimony Regarding H.B. 5237, An Act Concerning Fair Chance Employment

Good Afternoon Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak and Respected Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee,

My name is Erica Dean and I am a Policy Analyst at the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a statewide, nonprofit agency that works to reduce poverty and promote economic success through both policy work at the Capitol and program work in low-income communities.

I am here to support H.B. 5237, otherwise known as the "Ban the Box" policy.

- **"Ban the Box" Promotes Racial Equality**

The racial disparities present in the criminal justice system are well-known. Though African American's make up around 12.3% of the nation's population, 40% are behind bars. African American men are 6x's more likely to be incarcerated than white males and 2.5 times more likely than Hispanic males^{1,2}. The cumulative effect of this disparity is that today, fifty years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act and 150 years after the ratification of the Reconstruction Amendments, more black men are in prison, jail, on probation or parole than were enslaved in 1850³.

Research has shown that at the one-year mark of being released, between 60 and 75% of previously incarcerated individuals are unemployed⁴. Those that are employed make around 40% less in annual earnings than they did prior to incarceration and have limited upward mobility^{5,6}. After submitting job applications, those with criminal records are half as likely to receive an interview; for African American applicants, their chances of receiving an interview is reduced to 33%⁷. "Banning the box" will ensure that all Connecticut residents have a fair opportunity to be considered on their qualifications first, instead of being denied because of past mistakes.

¹ Clemons, J.T. (2014). Blind injustice: The Supreme Court, implicit racial bias, and the racial disparity in the criminal justice system. *American Criminal Law Review*, 51, 689 – 713.

² Drake, B. (2013). Incarceration gap widens between whites and blacks. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/09/06/incarceration-gap-between-whites-and-blacks-widens/>.

³ Alexander, M. (2012). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York, NY: The New Press.

⁴ Travis, J. (2005). *But they all come back: Facing the challenges of prisoner reentry*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.

⁵ The Pew Charitable Trusts. (2010). *Collateral costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility*. Washington, DC: The Pew Charitable Trusts.

⁶ Tierney, J. (2013, February 9). Prison and the poverty trap. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/19/science/long-prison-terms-eyed-as-contributing-to-poverty.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁷ Pager, D. (2003). The mark of a criminal record. *American Journal of Sociology*, 108, 937 – 975.